

HARD LUCK & LAUGHTER



MORE FOLK SONGS FROM MONTANA'S ORAL HISTORIES



Original Folk Songs Based upon Oral Histories
in the Permanent Collections
of the Montana State Historical Society

by

Scott and Kathleen Guehlstorff Crichton
"Curly & Kate"

To Our Ruby
Dear Ed,
Love
Kate & Scott
3-7-94

"Curly & Kate"

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Scott and Kathleen Guehlstorff Crichton ©1993

Cover Photograph:

"Fort Peck Dam Town, 1934"

Western Heritage Center,
Permanent Collections

MONTANA
CULTURAL
TRUST



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Songbooks and Tapes Available from:

Curly & Kate

Milwaukee Rode Productions

RR1 Box 1093

Fromberg, Montana 59029

DEDICATED TO OUR FAMILY



WITH LOVE

INTRODUCTION



Montana ranchers and farmers have a saying about this land: if you stick with it in the good years, it'll stick with you in the bad.

This saying illuminates the title of Curly and Kate's second collection of songs based on Montana oral histories, **HARD LUCK AND LAUGHTER**. In spite of hard luck—the bad years—still an irrepressible, rueful, self-aware laughter rises out of people trying to scratch a living out of a land that often “wasn't much but prairie grass and stone.”

“It was awful dry that spring,” begins one song. “We kept on thinking that it had to rain.” But no rains came, and 1934 became one of those bad years. Folks in the Powder River country of southeastern Montana had no choice but to get rid of their cattle. Despite low prices, “ranchers tried to hang on to their breeding stock and pride.../ They worked so hard and then to see it gone/Many lost their places/And many said goodbye/And I guess I'd never seen a grown man cry.”

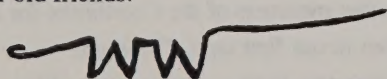
The integrity of these songs begins with the words, which come to us out of personal interviews preserved in the Montana Historical Society's archives. Kate—Kathleen Guehlstorff Crichton—has set these words faithfully to music, with help from Curly—her partner Scott Crichton.

Several of the eleven songs in Curly and Kate's 1989 collection, **MONTANA MEMORIES**, their first to be based on oral histories, deal with homesteading and the “Dirty Thirties”—not to mention mining, logging and operating a steamboat on Flathead Lake. **HARD LUCK AND LAUGHTER** offers several more songs from that era. We hear of landless, jobless people flocking to find work building Fort Peck Dam. We see a homestead family find “bulberry bushes/The ones that have those thorns” and take one home for their Christmas tree. We watch a rural school teacher and her pupils decorate the windows of the shack they've turned into a school by clipping “colored strips from some old magazines” to fashion “daisy chain curtains/Made with pictures of places that we'd never seen.” Another song tells us all we need to know about the necessity of community: “You opened your home up to strangers and friends/You were glad to be able to help for a night/'Cause you never knew when/You might get stuck again/And need help yourself for a couple of nights.”

We also hear of boom times, when “it was all good work/And we always had work/And we never laid around in the oil patch.” And we watch a terrifying forest fire “that burned up the sky.”

Finally, the voice of an old woman offers us vivid images out of her early life along the Stillwater River—picking apples, stretching quilts, hearing crosscut saws buzzing, learning how to read the clouds: “I am not alone,” she sings through the harmonies of Curly and Kate, “I have my memories 'round me/And they're my old friends.”

We are fortunate to have these memories turned into songs. They can become our old friends.



Wilbur Wood

November 1993 - Roundup, Montana

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This project has many "Godparents" and we would like to take a moment to thank them. The hardest working helper we had was John Terreo, former Oral Historian at the Montana State Historical Society. He has been a great believer in the concept of adapting oral histories to performing arts. Without his unflagging enthusiasm and assistance, this project would never have got off the ground. Although John is no longer with MSHS, he has left a great deal of work that Montanan's will be proud of for years to come. We would also like to thank Doris Peterson, formerly of the Montana State Oral History Office, as well. Her smiling face and persistent attention to details was greatly appreciated. A special thank-you to the Lewis & Clark Library is also in order. The Library served as our fiscal agent for the legislative grant to do the research for this project. Deborah Schlesinger, Executive Director of the Library, has not only been a delightfully enthusiastic supporter for both this project and the previous one, she has been a dear friend to us as well. And a big thank-you is also given to Becky Foster, Business Manager at the library, for attending to the nuts and bolts of grant compliance. We would like to thank the staff of the Montana Arts Council. They have graciously assisted us in many ways over the years. We owe a debt of gratitude to the Montana Committee for the Humanities who has included our programs on the MCH Speaker's Bureau Roster; we have been able to share our original songs and stories from oral histories with many Montanan's in rural areas and small towns who could not otherwise afford to get us there. Kate is particularly grateful to her Uncle Don, also referred to as "our patron saint of technology", for taking pity on her when she hand wrote all of the lead sheets for the last project. He supplied the new computer program to write musical notation in a far less stressful manner. And of course, we have to thank Kate's mom as well for the generous use of her computer. We never say thank-you enough to our family and longtime friends and to our supporters. We do so now. You are the ones that give us the heart to go on after all is said and done.

Finally, our heartfelt gratitude goes to the 1991 Montana State Legislature and the Long Range Planning Committee. The financial support we received through the Cultural and Aesthetic Projects Grant for the research portion of our work made the entire project possible. In particular, we would like to thank former Rep. Bob Thoft, (R) Stevensville, of the Long Range Planning Committee. During the legislative hearings, he offered to take the other members of the Committee for a lunchtime spin in his pick-up so they could listen to our first tape, "Montana Memories"... just in case it would help us. In true non-partisan fashion, he said he "didn't even mind that song about Hoover too much."

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The Watchman Engineer

Melvin L. Hanson was born and raised “up around the Forks community where the old Whitewater was.” He grew up working on steam engines and learned to be a watchman engineer from his father. When his “dad was an engine watchman...He had to work from Saturday clear to Monday morning. He got too long hours so then he’d send us kids down there to throw coal in, put water on the engine, so we grew up with it... it was just second nature to be on a steam locomotive.” Hanson graduated from Saco High School in 1935 when he was seventeen. His brother was already working at the Fort Peck Dam by that time and helped him to get a job there. All the single men had to live in the barracks. He remembers that “it was really nice. There was about twenty-four of us in there and everybody was just like one big happy family, always a cuttin’ up you know or doing something to the other guy....” Hanson worked as an engine watchman and as a fireman there. He later went on to run a gas switch engine pulling gravel trains from Snake Butte quarry (south of Harlem) to Fort Peck and back. He recalls that “when they blasted why they’d blow a whistle and wherever you was at on any outfit, truck drivers or scalers, enginemen, shovel runners, you were supposed to get down off your outfits and crawl under and get under a shelter...You can imagine shovels running, diesel shovels running, and steam engines working and dump trucks running. It was quite a noisy affair....” Hanson worked many jobs throughout his career, including working in the “gandy dancing gang”, and firing the boiler on a derrick boat. But he always liked “firing down at Fort Peck “ on the steam trains the best.

The Watchman Engineer

From the Oral History of Melvin L. Hanson

Words & Music by Kathleen G. Crichton ©1992

C D

Be - fore I went to Fort Peck There was no work to be
Chorus: Well you had to serv-ice the en - gines And grease up their side

G C

had rods The drought Fill up was bad the wa - ter wheat was bad And life was pret - ty
 rods Fill up the wa - ter and the oil 'Twas all part of the

D

hard job You'd But my broth - er told me Since I knew a - bout steam
 job You'd fill the lu - bri - ca - tors Make sure that all was

G C

trains fit And I should go down to Fort Peck And work out on those
 fit And you had to keep the steam built up That's all there was to

trains.
 it.

The Watchman Engineer

1. Before I went to Fort Peck
There was no work to be had
The drought was bad, the wheat was bad
And life was pretty hard
Then my brother told me
Since I knew about steam trains
I should go down to Fort peck
And work out on those trains.
2. I was an engine watchman
I learned it from my dad
I moved into the barracks
For that was a rule they had
We worked there just a short time
When the Government took over
And this is how we did our job
Me and my big brother.

Chorus: Well, you had to service the engines
And grease up their side rods
Fill up the water and the oil
'Twas all part of the job
You'd fill the lubricators
Make sure that all was fit
And you had to keep that steam built up
That's all there was to it.

3. When you came to work each shift
They'd tell you what to do
Which way the engines should
be turned
Where they were going to
If an engine went to Fort Peck
On the "Y" you'd run that day
Or if a train came in from Cole
You'd run the other way.
4. They ran a lot of gravel trains
With more'n a hundred cars
Sometimes it took two engines
Just to get them very far
Working at the engine house
It just kept getting busier
But we kept those engines serviced up
We watchman engineers.

Chorus:

Chorus:

5. Pretty soon the Government
They needed firemen
We got to be promoted up
From being just watchmen
On twenty-five foot trestles
Regularly we'd cross through
Daily going over the dam
'Twas kind of scary, too.

Chorus:

Daisy Chain Curtains—❖


Harriett Olson Harris was born in 1895 and was raised in Minnesota. After completing high school, she went through her teacher training. She received her certificate and took her first job in the small town of Heartland, North Dakota. She was quite popular because she was the only one in town that “would or could” play piano. “They got so, ‘come and see us Miss Olson and bring your music.’” She came to Montana in 1914 and remembers “I was in my second year and my brother wrote from Winifred, Montana that the cattlemen’s leases would be gone in two year’s time and land was... going to be opened up for squatter’s rights for anybody who wanted to squat on the land. So he said, ‘If you like adventure, why don’t you come out... We’ll put a marker on the place and we’ll hold it down for you until you come out in June.’...That was my stakeout for me.” She describes being met at the train by a ‘locator’. For \$50 he bought her a “tent shack” in which there was a bed on a “spring and hinges” that could be raised up on the wall during the day, an old fashioned laundry stove, and a cupboard above for supplies. The locator got her everything she needed including an axe, a water barrel and the water. She describes how she had to live on her claim continuously or else “somebody might jump my claim.” The early tent shack days were lean for all the squatters. “So, everybody helped everybody else. Somebody hauled my water for me and somebody had a whole bunch of wood chopped for me.” The contribution that she made to her little community was her teaching. “I stayed there all summer and fall. That’s when I found out there were some children that wanted to go to school...Those were the kids that the parents couldn’t afford to send them into town to stay to go to school. She asked the school superintendent in Havre for assistance and materials, and she taught the school in a make-shift schoolhouse in the Moen brother’s shack. Like the other folks that just helped out, she never took any payment for teaching that year of school or when she tutored the children in later summers.

Daisy Chain Curtains

From the Oral History of Harriet Olson Harris


Words & Music by Kathleen G. Crichton ©1992

G Em C




1. It was near - in' to sum - mer that when I came out to Mon -
 2. We cleaned out a shack that four men from South Da -

G Em A



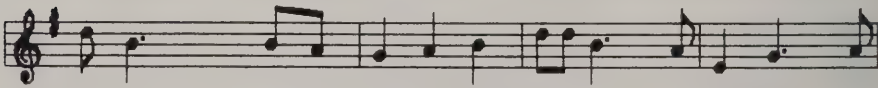
tan-a A sec - ond year teach - er just set - tl - ing
 ko-ta Let us use through the win - ter to serve as our

D G Em C



down school The hard-work-ing folks need - ed some - one to teach the
 We cleaned up the clut - ter and piled it in the

G Em C



chil-dren For they did - n't have mon - ey to school them in
 cor - ner Cleaned our good wood-stove up and we were read - y for

G Em Bm C

Refrain:

town school But one lit - tle girl said that we must make some

G Em A

cur-tains So we clipped col - ored strips from some old mag - a -

D G Em C

zines Wefash-ioned our win-dows with dai - sy chain cur -

G Em C

cur-tains made with pic-tures of plac - es that we'd nev - er

G

seen.

Daisy Chain Curtains

It was nearin' to summer when I came out to Montana
A second year teacher just settling down
The hardworking folks needed someone to teach the children
For they didn't have money to school them in town.

2. We cleaned out a shack that four men from South Dakota
Let us use through the winter to serve as our school
We cleaned up the clutter and piled it in the corner
Cleaned our good woodstove up and we were ready for school.

Refrain: But one little girl said that we must make some curtains
So we clipped colored strips from some old magazines
We fashioned our windows with daisy chain curtains
Made with pictures of places that we'd never seen.

3. On days that were nice we would walk up in the hillside
Where we'd study our science the birds and the trees
There were old tipi rings we could study in the valley
Back inside after rest we would write what we'd seen.

Refrain: The afternoon sunlight played upon our curtains
And lit up the strips from those old magazines
We gazed at the hillside through daisy chain curtains
Made with pictures of places that we'd never seen.

4. Though our little shack school with five kids and just the teacher
Was never too much by the schools of today
We had lessons shipped in and my books from North Dakota
Those kids studied hard and they passed all their grades.

Refrain: Though we didn't have much in our school to make it fancy
I remember those curtains from old magazines
We fashioned our windows with daisy chain curtains
Made with pictures of places that we'd never seen.

Deadman Creek Fire ————— ❖

Eric White was born on May 13, 1896. He moved to Montana with his family from Pennsylvania in 1915 and homesteaded north of Custer. Shortly after returning home from serving in the U. S. Army during World War I, he began working for the U. S. Forest Service. In 1921 he was transferred up to Porcupine in the Crazy Mountain district. There he met his wife, Grace, a schoolteacher at Porcupine School and they married in 1923. His wife was an important partner in running his districts throughout his career. In times of emergency, or of being short-handed, when he was out in the field, or when he was called upon to run the Civilian Conservation Corps camps, his wife “did most of the running of my district...” She even” got the men lined up to go out on a fire and stuff like that. Never got paid for it...But she did it.” During the winter it was always important to continue patrols. In the early days, skis weren’t popular and most rangers got around by snowshoes or “webs”. But they were slow and were “mankillers”, and he describes how he had to custom order his skis because they weren’t easily available. Working for the Forest Service was interesting and varied. Two of his duties were to monitor grazing, and to perform elk studies. He recalls that over the years he “became quite a botanist, because your carrying capacity (of the land) depends on the plants that grow. Some have a high food value for food and some don’t have any. You have to rate the coverage by what’s growing on it.” He also had many experiences in both fire prevention and in fighting fires. He set up “fire guards for the ranchers, organized with fire fighting tools. We paid them to go out on fires when we asked them or if they saw a fire to go out and put it out without notifying me.” He worked on the infamous Mann Gulch Fire in 1949 and “was in charge of the service of supplies for that fire.” Two years before White was to retire from the Forest Service, “in the latter part of September 1955”, and when he was Helena district ranger, the Deadman Creek fire broke out. It was so bad that “I even went out on the fire. Every available man was on fire line... It took me six months to get that back to normal.”

The Deadman Creek Fire

From the Oral History of Eric White

Words & Music by Kathleen G. Crichton ©1992

Am G

It was in late Sep - tem - ber when I got the

Am C

call A look - out was just shut - ting down for the

E Am C

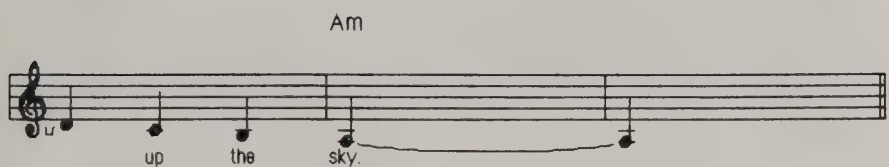
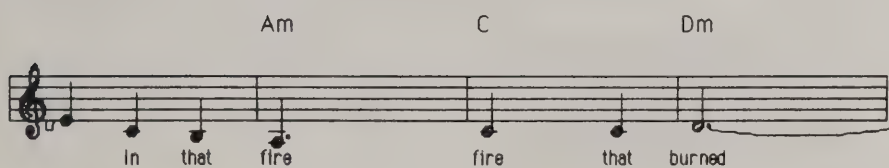
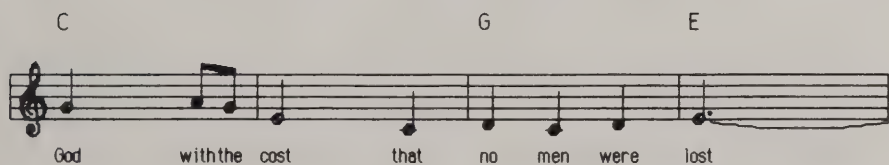
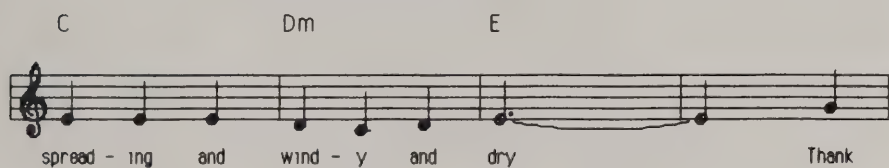
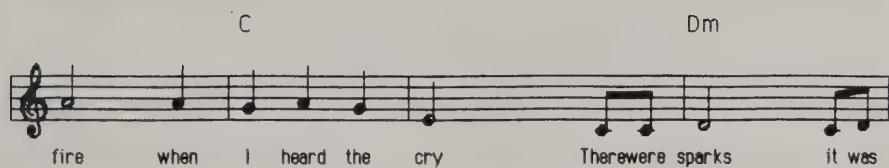
fall It hap - pened he just could - n't sleep that one

E Am C Dm

night Or he might not have spot - ted that small

Am

fire - light. chorus: It was fire



The Deadman Creek Fire

1. It was in late September when I got the call
A lookout was just shutting down for the fall
It happened he just couldn't sleep that one night
Or he might not have spotted that small firelight.
2. He drove down to Lincoln to telephone through
He finally got me at home around two
With most of the fire crew laid off for the fall
We were lucky to have any crew on at all.

Chorus:

It was fire, fire when I heard the cry
There were sparks, it was spreading, and windy and dry
Thank God with the cost that no men were lost
In that fire, fire that burned up the sky.

3. From the Helena office I radioed out
Got hold of the road crew and sent them all out
I said take our tanker with water pumps, too
Then I sent out the Canyon Ferry Fire District crew.
4. They were having a hard time just holding it back
It was windy and dry and more fires would catch
They asked for more help, maybe twenty-five men
Told the city police grab anyone you can.
7. Indian crews all tooled and trained right
From five or six tribes were sent to firefight
Missoula Fire Office was kept on the line
Sent truckloads of men and equipment on time.

Chorus:

5. The fire was just getting worse all the time
I got the Missoula Fire Office on the line
They sent out enough grub and equipment, too
With a complete hundred man fire crew.
8. We got the fire safe it was all circled up
Then the worst wind I ever saw in the
mountains came up
It blew the trees over, that wind it just howled
The fire got roaring again and it crowned.
6. I was finally able to get to the fire
It was rapidly building and spreading, that fire
Both banks of a narrow side stream it burnt through
Just before it exploded I got out my crew.
9. It jumped the fire line and was spreading again
We pulled all the crews to fight fire again
Every available man fought that day
Thank God we got it put down and the
men were okay.

Chorus:

Chorus:

Dad's Model T

Elizabeth Phelps was born in 1923 and was raised on her parent's homestead near Sidney. She remembers growing up through the Depression years: "we didn't have running water on the farm. We kids were the running water. We went and got it. We carried it to the house and then we carried it out...It was a good place for a kid to be raised in that day and age...It's wonderful for a child to grow up in the country... I treasure that life of growing up on a farm." She has many memories of getting around on the dirt roads. She recalls that in the early days, they got around by horses and wagons or buggies. But later on her dad bought a brand new Model T Ford. "About the only time, of course, we could use our cars... was in the summertime because we didn't have good roads... They were just dirt roads and some of them were really, really muddy, you know, and you'd get stuck." And in the winter it could be worse. She remembers the time "that mother came to town and she... got snowed in for about six weeks in the spring of 1936." She also recalls that the roads followed the mile-long section lines around the homesteads, and that they could be very bewildering to strangers. "You went one mile this way then a mile that way and then you went a mile this way and then you went a mile that way. It was a zig-zaggy road."

Dad's Model T

From the Oral History of Elizabeth Phelps

Words & Music by Kathleen G. Crichton ©1992

1. I re - mem - ber back to when I was just
2. We trav - eled by sled and a team when it

five snowed We'd hitch up horse bug - gies to trav - el to
By bug - gy or buck - board in warm sum - mer -

town time We trav - eled on roads full of
But the best ride by far was in

gum - bo and holes And ruts made by gul - ly wash
Dad - dy's new car In Dad's Mod - el T down the

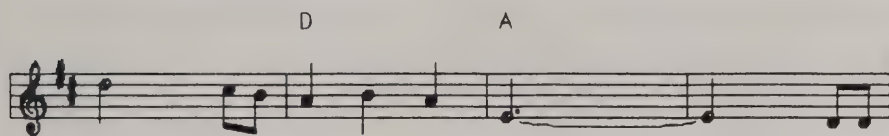
reins pour - in' down.
old sec - tion lines.

I re - mem - ber it



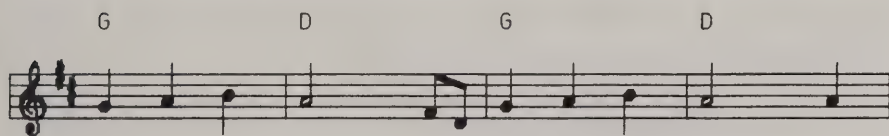
had snap - on cur-tains

You could put the top



down when the weath - er was fine

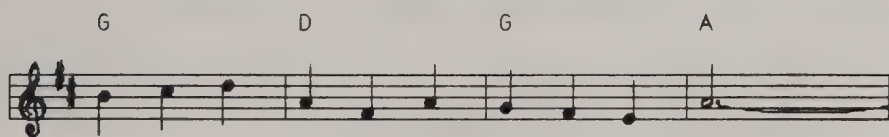
But you



had to watch out

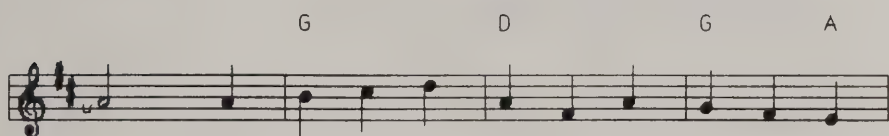
so you would - n't stall out

In

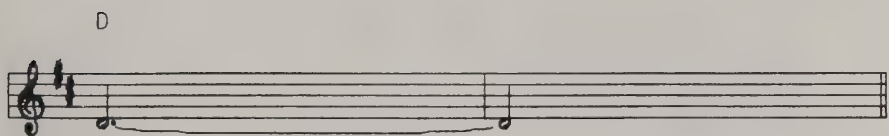


Dad's Mod - el

T when you made those steep climbs



In Dad's Mod - el T when you made those steep



climbs.

Dad's Model T

1. I remember back to when I was just five
We'd hitch up horse buggies to travel to town
We traveled on roads
Full of gumbo and holes
And ruts made by gully wash rains pourin' down.

2. We traveled by sled and a team when it snowed
By buggy or buckboard in warm summertime
But the best ride by far
Was in Daddy's new car
In Dad's Model T down the old section lines.

Chorus: I remember it had snap-on curtains
You could put the top down when the weather was fine
But you had to watch out
So you wouldn't stall out
In Dad's Model T when you made those steep climbs
In Dad's Model T when you made those steep climbs.

3. We just couldn't drive those old cars in the cold
We dreaded the gullies and dreaded the mud
And we had quite a time
Getting up those steep climbs
More often than not we would stall out real good.

Chorus:

4. You opened your home up to strangers and friends
You were glad to be able to help for a night
'Cause you never knew when
You might get stuck again
And need help yourself for a couple of nights.

Chorus:

The Stars Shone Bright—❖

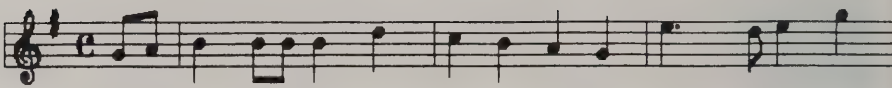
Edna Patterson was born in Iowa in 1901 and was the oldest of the children in her family. Her parents homesteaded in the Glendive area in 1910. She describes her first images of the homestead: “and ah the great big grass...and that’s all there was, grass out there, not a stick, not a limb, not a stone, just grass, grass, grass, like a sea of grass.” She recalls her mother coming out on the train with five children to live at the homestead. They brought the copper wash boiler, and wooden boxes full of tools and belongings. They spent their first few nights with her aunt and uncle at their homestead nearby. Then, on December 23, she and her family moved onto their own place and celebrated Christmas in their new home. The early days on the homestead were days of getting by on not much with lots of imagination. She describes having to stand up to eat dinner because they had no furniture, cooking on a woodstove that they just stood out on the prairie, and the fun of coasting down hills on the long dry grass on sleds and looking for agates. To prepare their beds for their first night on the homestead, she recalls that her father filled the strawticks with hay but “we had to be real careful not to get a snake in there....”

The Stars Shone Bright

From the Oral History of Edna Patterson


Words & Music by Kathleen G. Crichton ©1992

6 C



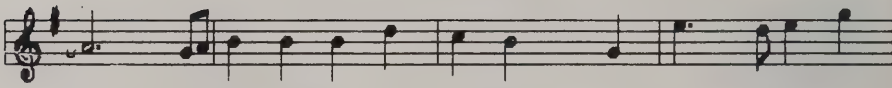
Ear-ly in the Decem - ber morn - ing There was just a skiff of

G D



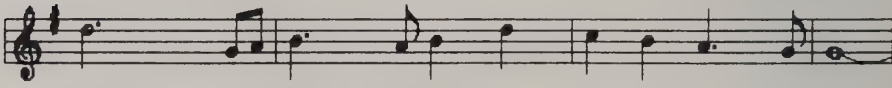
snow As we rode out to stay in our new home

G C



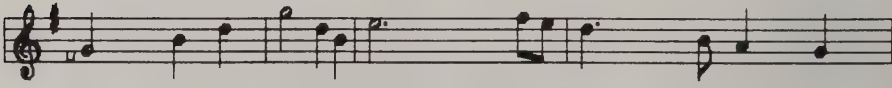
In a three walled barn haif fin - ished With noth - ing o - ver

G C D G




head Daddy said that we'd keep safe un - til the dawn

C G



On that first night Under stars that shone so

C G C D G



bright We would sleep with-in the shel-ter of our home.

The Stars Shone Bright

1. Early in the December morning
There was just a skiff of snow
As we rode out to stay in our new home
In a three walled barn half finished
With nothing over head
Daddy said that we'd keep safe until the dawn.
 On that first night
 Under stars that shone so bright
 We would sleep within the shelter of our home.
2. Momma took we kids in the buggy
To find a Christmas tree
In the coulees there weren't many to be found
There were two nice little cedars
But we had to leave them be
If we cut them there would be no more around.
 But our hearts burned bright
 For a Christmas tree that night
 To share within the walls of our new home.
3. We found bullberry bushes
You know the ones that have those thorns
We took one home to make a Christmas tree
Momma gave us old newspapers
Even those were pretty scarce
And we made some decorations for our tree.
 Oh the stars shone bright
 On that prairie winter's night
 While we dreamed of Christmas eve in our new home.
4. Momma got us ready
Washed faces and cleaned hands
We crept to bed by lantern light
We laid horse blankets over us
And still in all our clothes
We snuggled down on strawticks for the night.
 Oh the stars shone bright
 On that prairie Christmas night
 While we slept within the shelter of our home.
5. Those early days weren't easy
We all worked hard on the farm
There wasn't much but prairie grass and stone
But we made do with what we had
Found things to put around
And we made our little barn into a home.
 Oh the stars shone bright
 In the prairie sky at night
 As we rested from our work in our new home.

 Oh the stars shone bright
 On those prairie Christmas nights
 How I wish that I could see home once again.

The 90 Mile Trail

Charlotte Edwards was born on December 3, 1913 and raised in Southeastern Montana. In 1934, she worked as a secretary in a drought assistance office of the Agricultural Adjustment Administration in Powder River County. Her descriptions of the severe drought that year and its effects on the people and the livestock are bleak. People began "demanding something be done because cattle were starving to death. And there was no grass...." Even though some of the ranchers had hay, the cattle couldn't eat it without water. "It takes so much more and water was the biggest problem." In June of 1934 the Federal Government set up a program to ship the cattle out of the drought stricken areas. She worked in the Broadus office which set up the program to trail the cattle to Gillette and Kendrick, Wyoming, the two rail stations that could receive cattle. It was approximately 90 miles to Gillette from Broadus, and 60 miles to Kendrick. The program "started right at the end of June...and of course every head of cattle had to be appraised and inspected and all the paperwork that went on added to the confusion. A really tremendous job was done in a short amount of time. It was a real emergency program. I went to work at seven o'clock and worked until ten or eleven... seven days a week." Her job was to type in the price paid per animal after the appraisers went out to the ranches and set the price, and she had to fill out all the forms in five copies. The young twenty year old grew up a lot from that experience. "I realized that life was not a carefree fun time. There were so many things so much more important...to see people losing...their places...." Almost everyone had mortgages on their livestock. "It was just a matter of course at that time." That meant, when the checks for the livestock were issued, at least half of the amount went back to the lienholders and the banks. The appraisals were very low, with an average price of \$14.23 per head, "which doesn't leave very much...if...they owed over half of that...." About 50,000 head of cattle were shipped out in roughly one month, a monumental task. "The people working in 1934 were people of the industry and knew what they were doing in that disaster and emergency. They met the challenge."

The Ninety Mile Trail

From the Oral History of Charlotte Edwards

Words & Music by Kathleen G. Crichton ©1992

Em D Em

Back in nineteen thirty four it was aw - ful dry that spring We

D Em

kept on think-ing that it had to rain We

D Em

kept on think-ing that it had to rain Well it

D Em

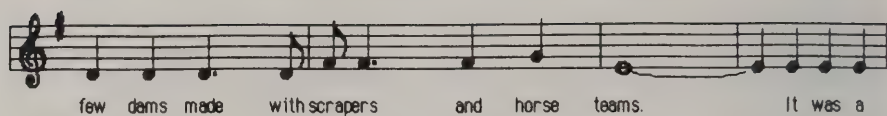
didn't rain and no water stored We just re-lied on springs And a

D Em

few dams made with scrapers and horse teams And a

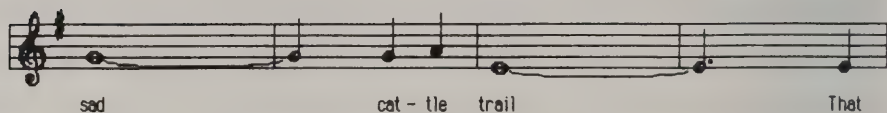
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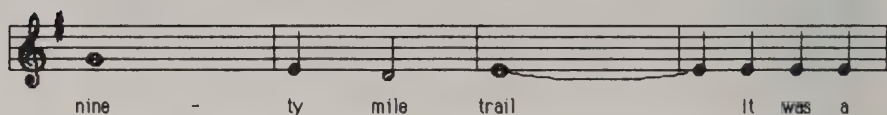
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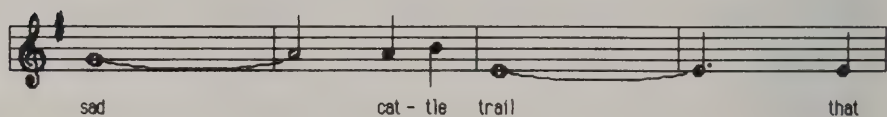
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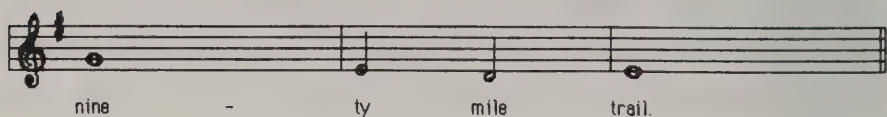
C

Em



C

Em



The 90 Mile Trail

1. Back in 1934
It was awful dry that spring
We kept on thinking that it had to rain
We kept on thinking that it had to rain
Well it didn't rain and no water stored
We just relied on springs
And a few dams made with scrapers
and horse teams
And a few dams made with scrapers
and horse teams.
2. With the cattle starving
Something had to be done right away
There was no grass, just a few folks
had some hay
But without water folks just can't
feed hay
The great chiefs back in Washington
For June a program set
By which they trailed the cattle
to Gillette
By which they trailed the cattle
to Gillette.

Chorus: It was a sad cattle trail
That ninety mile trail
It was a sad cattle trail
That ninety mile trail
3. The cattle they were each appraised
But the prices were so low
No more than fifteen dollars for a cow
And sometimes just four dollars
for a cow
Ranchers tried to hang onto
Their breeding stock and pride
As they took their losses all in stride
As they took their losses all in stride.
4. When those folks came in to sign the forms
I realized what they'd done
They'd worked so hard and then to see it gone
They'd worked so hard and then to see it gone
Many lost their places
And many said good-bye
And I guess I'd never seen a grown man cry
And I guess I'd never seen a grown man cry.

Chorus:
5. It was tough to move that many head
Out in such short a time
They trailed five hundred cattle in each line
They trailed five hundred cattle in each line
They moved those herds down to Gillette
To ship them out by rail
That was along the 90 mile trail
That was along the 90 mile trail.
6. That line of cattle looked just like
An army in retreat
The best were slaughtered and the rest
went to relief
The best were slaughtered and the rest
went to relief
Those Powder River ranching folks
They knew just what to do
Though it was a loss they saw it through
Though it was a loss they saw it through.

Chorus:
7. Back in 1934
It was so awful dry
And I guess I'd never seen a grown man cry
And I guess I'd never seen a grown man cry.



Earl Doughty first came to the Kevin area with his stepdad, “who was an old driller”, in 1922. It was a different life than the one the thirteen year old from Malta was used to and he “didn’t know an oil well from a fence post.” There was always something “going on around Kevin. Quite a few bootlegging joints and... it was a bunch of hardy people around...” Doughty first started driving truck when he was sixteen years old and “more or less up until 1940.” He worked a variety of jobs in and around the oilfield. He “worked on the rig some, pumping on some of these leases and I also worked on the clean-out machines and stuff like that. But my main thing up until about 1940 was driving truck....” He tells of the many dangers involved in oil drilling as an every day fact of life. His stepdad was killed when he “pulled a rigging on himself pulling casing in 1927....” He also recalls the constant potential for fire in those days of wooden rigs “because they always had a boiler there you see, for that’s what that was powered by, was steam... I remember one (fire) in 1928 I rode out with a fella... and that thing was burning all over a hundred feet in the air there. You could drive right through Oilmont here and read the paper at midnight just from the light of that fire over there, three, four miles away.” And the men who “torpedoed” or “shot” the dry wells with nitroglycerine were common casualties in those days before acid was used to break up the tight limestone formations and free up the remaining oil. He recalls that there were eighteen hundred men working in the oil field in its heyday. There were so many rigs that “at night there in Kevin, you look all over out here and it was all lit up, it looked like a big forest all over the whole country.” And he remembers that it was a pretty active community “...Oilmont here had over seven hundred people here at one time. Kevin I don’t remember... and Sunburst, well, Sunburst is a nice little town yet....”

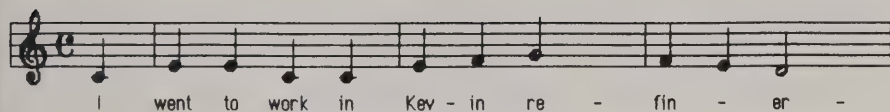
In the Oil Patch

From the Oral History of Earl Doughty

Words & Music by Kathleen G. Crichton ©1992

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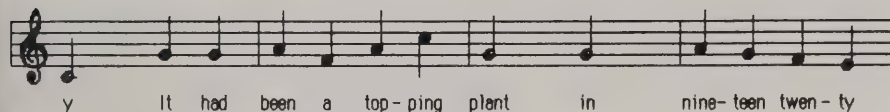


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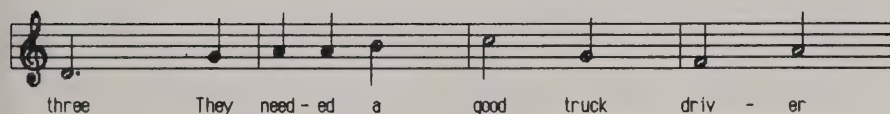


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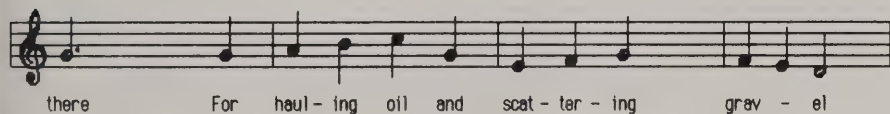


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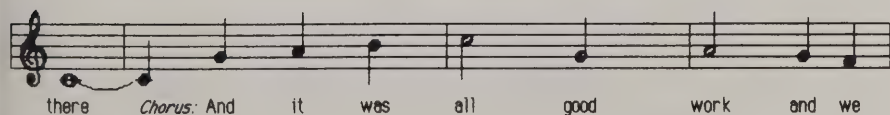
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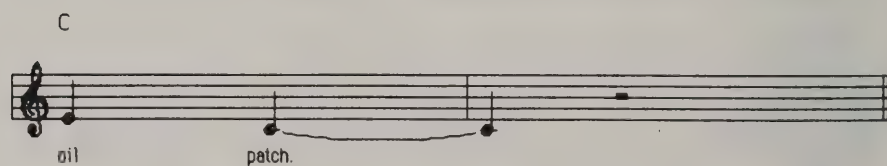
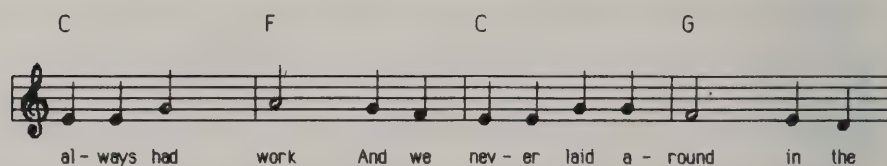
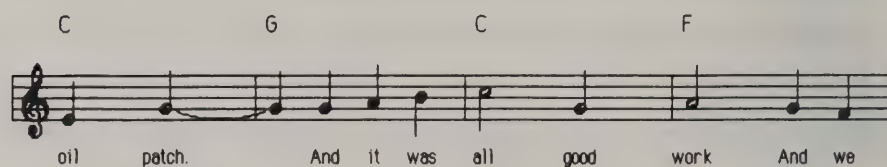
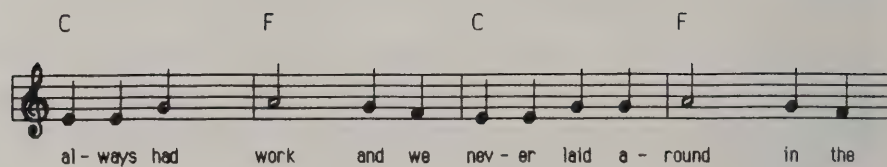
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In the Oil Patch

1. I went to work in Kevin refinery
It had been a topping plant in nineteen twenty-three
They needed a good truck driver there
For hauling oil and scattering gravel there.

Chorus: And it was all good work
And we always had work
And we never laid around in the oil patch
And it was all good work
And we always had work
And we never laid around in the oil patch.

2. Everybody worked back along in them days
When I wasn't driving truck then out a-ways
I'd pump on a lease all winter and then
Next spring I'd drive dray truck again.

Chorus:

3. An oil driller learned to pound away
If lucky he was done in just twelve days
He was raking those tools just standing there
With his doghouse he'd drill in the midnight air.

Chorus:

4. The tool dresser dressed all them old bits
He heated up the steel and pounded on it
Back out the gates when they got wore
They don't dress the bits like that anymore.

Chorus:

5. Now the shooters used nitroglycerine
They shot dry wells so the oil'd come in
There was a lot shooters that got blown up
Torpedoing formations so they'd open up.

Chorus: But it was...

6. I never did much drilling 'cause they drilled all night
I started pulling casings so I'd work in daylight
I worked at plugging up abandoned wells for years
There was always lots of work for you to do around here.

Chorus:

Goodbye Oklahoma

Ray Howard was “born in the eastern part of Montana right along side of the Missouri River” in 1905. He grew up in Mondak along the North Dakota border near Fort Union. His father “came out there when he was a young man. He worked at the fort. He was a wheelwright.” Howard spent his youth on the family ranch and remembers raising oats and barley and hogs. His father was quite a horse trader during his life and left his son “sixty head of mares when he died.” In the late twenties Howard and his wife took over the family homestead. But the dry weather had set in and the “land was there but if it didn’t rain it was useless.” He and his wife “gave up farming.” By this time, the depression and drought had hit the entire nation hard. The Federal Government had started the the Works Progress Administration (W. P. A.) to get the people back to work. Building of the great earth-filled dam at Fort Peck was such a project and was run by the U. S. Army Corps of Engineers. Thousands of people came from all over the country to find work there. The Howards decided to try their luck as well. They had a good truck and “built a little house on it...” They loaded up their family and went to Fort Peck. But living conditions were tough. There were no paved roads, little housing, and no running water. Many people arriving with their families camped in tents. The Howards “lived in a tent pretty near two years” and in their little truck house. Later, they were able to build a shack out of board “they made up... out of corn stalks.” When the opportunity arose, they bought “a good paying little restaurant” near the spillway in McCone City. “We had more business than we could take care of... when I need extra help I’d go down to the red light district and I could always get a couple of them girls to help in the restaurant. There were lots of times we did that every day....” The work on the dam continued for four or five years and “there must have been a couple thousand of them working on that spillway... We tried to feed these fellows good.” Howard’s memories of Fort Peck in the boom days are bleak and hectic, and wild and grim.

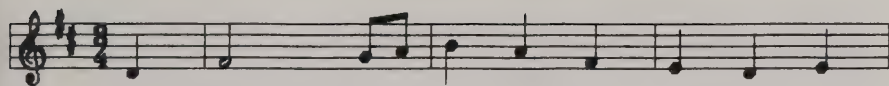
Goodbye Oklahoma

From the Oral History of Ray Howard

Words & Music by Kathleen G. Crichton ©1992

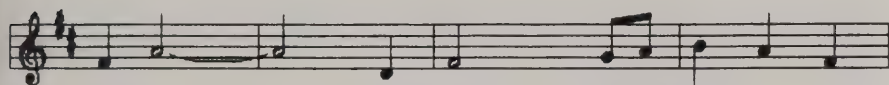
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That year we had on - ly a few head of
Chorus: Good - bye O - kla - ho - ma we've noth - in' to

D



cat - tie We fed them old straw just to
 keep us We're leav - in' the dust bowl our

A

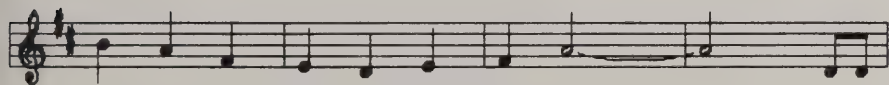
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keep them a - live We had a - cres of
 land's blown a - way Our car's broken

A

D



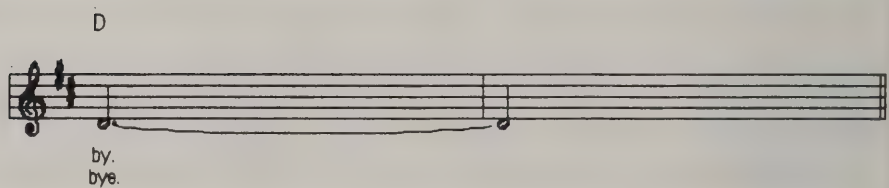
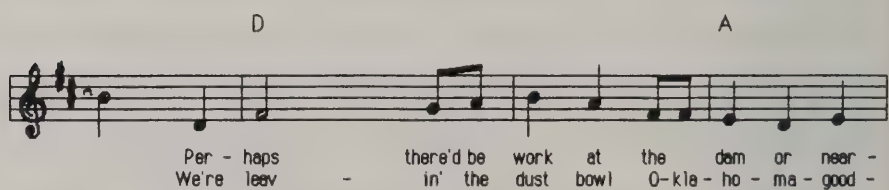
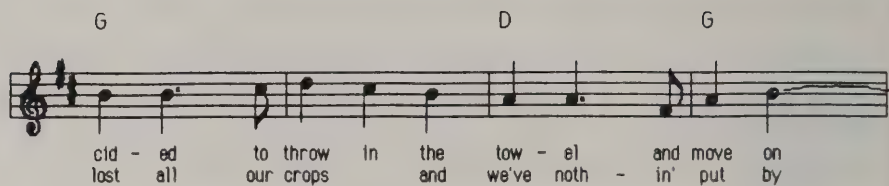
wheat that I plowed up and plant - ed Put
 down we've got noth - in' to feed us Just a

A

D



seed in the ground and then watched it die We de -
 goat tied in back for some milk on the way We've



Goodbye Oklahoma

1. That year we had only a few head of cattle
We fed them old straw just to keep them alive
We had acres of wheat that I plowed up and planted
Put seed in the ground and then watched it die
We decided to throw in the towel and move on
Perhaps there'd be work at the dam or nearby.

Chorus: Goodbye Oklahoma we've nothin' to keep us
We're leavin' the dust bowl our land's blown away
Our car's broken down we've got nothin' to feed us
Just a goat tied in back for some milk on the way
We've lost all our crops and we've nothin' put by
We're leavin' the dust bowl Oklahoma goodbye.

2. When we came to this place there was buck brush and nothin'
We slept in our tent and that's all that we had
There was plenty that suffered those people that come here
If they had a few dollars it wasn't so bad
I met a man who had come with his family
They left Oklahoma where the dust bowl was bad.

Chorus:

3. Those people that come here were poor they had nothin'
With barely enough to just get here I guess
They thought it would all be okay once they got here
It had to be better out here in the west
But they found it was hard, they weren't used to the workin'
And they just made enough for some groceries at best.

Chorus:

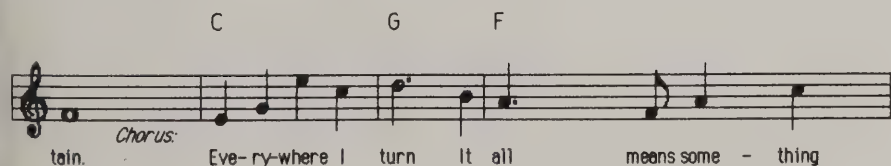
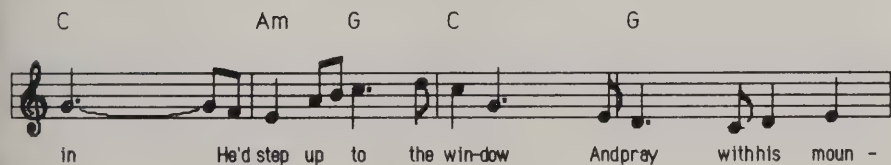
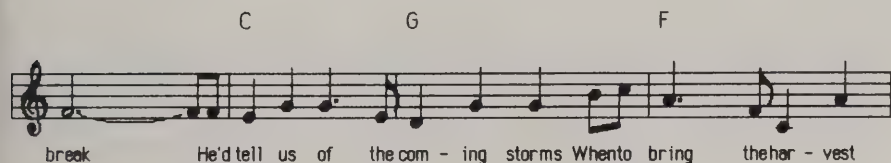
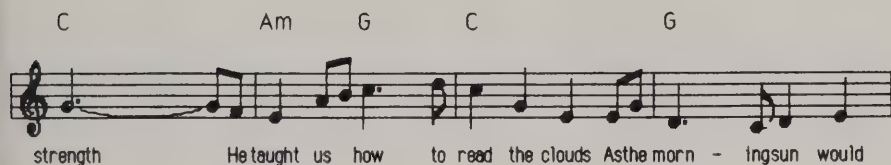
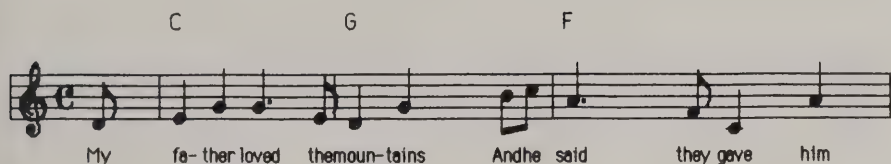
Everywhere I Turn

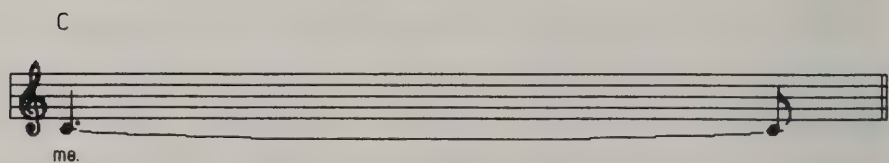
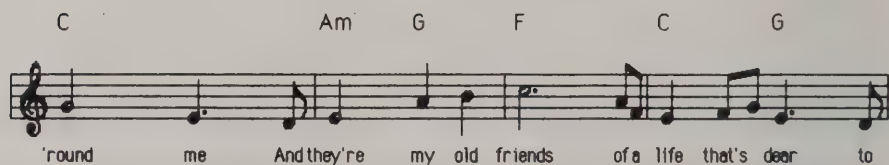
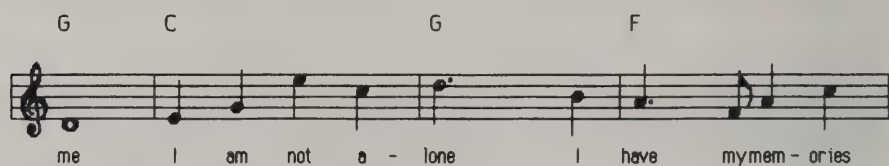
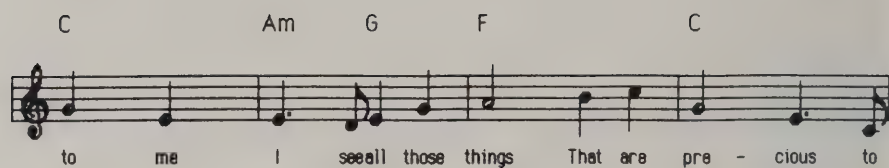
Mattie Lathom Scott was born in 1897 and grew up on a ranch located between Absarokee and Columbus. She remembers that they were very self-sufficient, growing their food, hunting game and raising their own livestock for butcher. But their main source of income was from cattle. "Father run the stock and then shipped the cattle every fall...He and his neighbors or friends would bring their cattle into Columbus and ship them and most of the shipments went to Chicago. Then we would get a big check for the cattle that were shipped and my mother immediately sat down with the Sears and Roebuck catalog and made out her list for the year almost 'til the next shipment, and our clothing, our coats, our shoes...mother got (us) a size larger than the time before, our long stockings, all of those things were ordered. Also our staple groceries, our crackers, our codfish, our dried fruits, and we got Arbuckle coffee...those orders...(were) mailed right away to Chicago and that shipped back before Christmas. We never saw the boxes unpacked after we went to bed. Now I know a lot of things we saw at Christmas, dolls and toys and games...came in that same box around November. That (cattle) was the main source of our livelihood." The family also milked a few cows, selling the butter or cream, and sold fresh strawberries that the children picked from their large strawberry patch in the summer. She recalls that her father planted "three complete orchards" when she was young, and that "all the neighbors in the lower Stillwater had big apple orchards" in those days. She reflects upon the "farms and their conveniences and the farm woman today doesn't raise a chicken, she buys her butter at the store, she buys all her meat, they don't raise things like that...so they don't live as good a life, it may be an easier life, but I don't think it's as satisfying a life. " But as much as she loved many of the old ways, she doesn't look back "with a great deal of pleasure toward wash day... They had to fill the boilers Sunday night and my mother would put two boilers on a big wash stove outside. They'd start that warming up out by the pump. If it was in the wintertime it was in the house on the big kitchen range and as a... child...I was able to stand on a box and rub certain clothes on the old wash board...(mother) was a meticulous washer... so there was always at least three waters after you had washed them to get the soap out...." Her memories of growing up on the ranch are full of the joy and community knowledge that come from living "in a place a long time."

Everywhere I Turn

From the Oral History of Mattie Lathom Scott

Words & Music by Kathleen G. Crichton ©1992





Everywhere I Turn

1. My father loved the mountains
He said they gave him strength
He taught us how to read the clouds
As the morning sun would break
He'd tell us of the coming storms
When to bring the harvest in
He'd step up to the window
And pray with his mountain.

Chorus: Everywhere I turn
It all means something to me
I see all those things
That are precious to me
I am not alone
I have my memories 'round me
And they're my old friends
Of a life that's dear to me.

2. I recall the orchards
That were there when I was young
My brother and I we loved to ride
Picking apples one by one
Not many of those trees are left
They break and then they fall
And when I am gone no one will know
The old trees there at all.

Chorus:

3. I remember times of cold and wood
When the quilts were stitched upon
The women sewed, outside it snowed
And the children all kept warm
The crosscut saws were buzzin'
And the men were stacking wood
Those cold winter days were joyous days
And life was full and good.

Chorus:



(Margaret Benes Miller)

CURLY & KATE

are Scott and Kathleen Guehlstorff Crichton, folk musicians who have been performing as a duo since 1984. Through Milwaukee Rode Productions they have produced three previous recording projects in addition to their recording of "Hard Luck and Laughter: More Folk Songs from Montana's Oral Histories." They make their home in Fromberg, Montana.

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